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Destroying Self-Esteem

You take hours to capture the perfect picture, filling up your phone or camera with 100 pictures that are basically identical. You then narrow your selection down to two pictures, trying to decide which is the best. Once you pick the picture, you go to your favorite editing app to make it “perfect”. Finally, you take you time to write the perfect caption to post on Instagram. But how come? Why take all that time to post a single picture? Whether it is a selfie, a picture with your friend, or even a picture of the vacation you went on, in this generation everything has to be perfect. We care so much about the amount of likes we get on our pictures. We have to make sure everyone likes us, and if that means making everyone jealous of you, it’s what will be done. But what if you’re that person where no matter how much you edit your pictures or how hard to try to make people like you through your Instagram posts, you still don’t get very many likes or followers at all? You see other people in your school receiving hundreds of likes and follower after follower. How does it make you feel? Are you sad, jealous, self-conscious, happy for them, or not affected at all? No matter who you are, you have some sort of reaction, whether it be a large reaction or a small one. Pictures online could make you jealous of not only their body or their looks, but also the things that they are participating in. It is so easy to see what celebrities are doing by following them on Instagram, giving young adults a false perception of what life is all about. Instagram can also cause other issues such as eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, and other issues with health. But, with all of the negative impacts that Instagram can have on a person’s self-esteem, there are also multiple positive ways that Instagram improves self-esteem as well. There are so many people out there on Instagram and other social media that are trying to help improve the self-esteem of others and give them a sense of happiness in their life. Instagram is a powerful website that has extreme effects on one’s self-esteem.

FIRST HEADER: SECONDARY RESEARCH, LITERARY BACKGROUND,

This topic has brought about multiple different areas of discussion. When researching, I found a lot of interesting information about the importance of likes and followers for the owners of Instagram accounts. According to [Katlyn Tolly](http://college.usatoday.com/author/katlyn-tolly/) at USA Today, “college students who use social media sites more frequently or on a daily basis agreed that the number of ‘likes’ is valued.” Another bit of information I learned from Tolly was for a tool of verification and acceptance within their group of peers, students used the number of likes they received on their photos. This would mean that if they did not received a large number of likes on their photo, they would feel as if they weren’t accepted by those around them. One statement by Tolly that I was surprised by was when she stated that only a few of the students she asked said they would take down a photo if it didn’t receive the number of likes they wanted. That still means that there are students out there and if they didn’t receive enough likes on their photo, they felt embarrassed enough to actually take down the picture. It makes you wonder just how much likes mean to some people (Tolly). [Mahita Gajanan](http://www.theguardian.com/profile/mahita-gajanan) asked woman, Michelle Linker, about her thoughts on the importance of likes on her pictures and she responded by saying “I feel anxiety over how many likes I get after I post a picture. If I get two likes, I feel like, what’s wrong with me” (Gajanan)? Danielle Tullo from Cosmopolitan asked “Meg” about her thoughts on the matter and she replied by saying "Whether I post a selfie or a picture of a sunset, I am very self-conscious of how many likes I get. I don't even have that many followers, but I'm totally guilty of deleting any posts that didn't get enough likes. Even worse? How long I spend contemplating if a picture I want to share is good enough." (Tullo) How does one know if a picture is “good enough” to post on Instagram? What is the determining factor? Is it whether or not it will receive a lot of likes in the future? Whether or not the people who follow you will think it’s pretty or good looking? Those are the things that make you wonder. Although all of that is puzzling, the thing that surprised me the most was from Olivia Fleming at Elle. She stated the surprising fact that “companies have begun to look at your number of followers as both a measure of monetary value and a career determiner” (Fleming). Since when do you look at someone for a job based on the amount of friends they have or how popular they are? This is just one more thing that is said to add to the stresses of social media. Now people have to wonder whether or not their employers or future bosses are looking at their profiles, and hoping they like what they see. This world is full of social media, and now that they are incorporating it into the working world, it is becoming even more difficult to escape for some. Not only are people becoming obsessed with the number of likes they receive on their pictures, they also are dealing with the negative aspects of jealousy when others post pictures of their vacations, adventures, parties, and other fun things in their lives.

According to Katlyn Tolly from USA Today, she shares that from the students she talked to, almost all of them shared that they have felt some type of “FOMO,” aka “The Fear of Missing Out.” Seeing others your age having amazing experiences in their lives can make anyone jealous if they’re not doing the same things. Jealousy is such an easy emotion to experience these days and it makes it hard to be happy for people when, in reality, you just want to do what they’re doing. Tolly also states that they students explained that their stress or anxiety levels are higher when they are looking at photos of their peers having a great time because they are constantly comparing others’ lives to theirs through photos (Tolly). Essena O’Neil’s, an Australian teenager, story was highlighted by The Guardian. She quit Instagram and gave it the name “contrived perfection”. She believed that Instagram was all about “contrived perfection made to get attention” and she didn’t want any part of that (Gajanan). It is easy to see the different ways to get attention on Instagram. People are constantly posting pictures of happiness in their lives, all out to make people think their lives are perfect just to get a follow. But the ones who get the most attention aren’t the ones you go to school with, but the ones in the spot light, celebrities.

Celebrities are all over Instagram. They’re posting pictures of their photoshoots, exciting vacations, relationships, selfies, and almost anything else you could think of in their “perfect lives”. But what people don’t understand is that almost every picture that gets posted on Instagram by celebrities is edited beyond belief. Fleming shares again that “young girls are looking at selfies on Instagram and they're not realizing that some people are using apps to totally change what they look like” (Fleming). The amount of editing apps and sites out there these days is astonishing and you couldn’t count them all with 10 hands. Iskra Lawrence, a 24-year-old model interviewed by Elle, described how "there are apps out there which can change everything: your eye color, the size of your eyes, slim your cheeks" (Fleming). There is really an app for everything. Danielle Tullo, from Cosmopolitan, interviews “CJ” about her thoughts on celebrity Instagram posts. When asked, CJ explains how “today, especially, there are tons of pictures of Kendall Jenner on Instagram and I'm sure thousands of 20-year-old girls worldwide died a little inside when they realized she's now the same age as they are but also skinny, beautiful, and walking in the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show” (Tullo). Victoria’s Secret models are who they are to show off clothing, typically bras, underwear, and swimsuits. With wearing these outfits, a great body “must” come along with it which gives off the perception that “only women with bodies like these will look good in these outfits.” But, with all of these reasons, do people really feel it impacting their self-esteem?

Self-esteem is described as the reflection of a person’s overall subjective emotional evaluation of his or her own worth and a judgement of oneself as well as an attitude towards themselves. According to the peer review article by Naomi Berman, “unrealistic, photoshopped and stereotyped images used by the media, advertising and fashion industries influence young people’s body images and impact on their feelings of body satisfaction, self-esteem and confidence” (Berman). The media seems to have a specific body type that they rave over, giving others who don’t necessarily have that body type, a feeling of worthlessness. Also in the article by Berman, a youth survey by Mission Australia 2012 discovered that “despite several government initiatives introduced to address the problem, body image was one of the top three issues of personal concern for young people” (Berman). The fact that this is one of the top three issues of personal concern for young people has to mean something. Self-esteem is becoming a bigger issue as time goes on. One thing that is not talked about often is the issues with self-esteem in men. According to Julie L. Andsager’s peer reviewed journal, “Exposure to media images that focus on men’s physique has been positively correlated with body dissatisfaction for Canadian gay and heterosexual men” (Andsager). I love that this was addressed because it shows not only the information about self-esteem issues in women, but in men as well. With self-esteem issues in men not discussed, it causes one to jump to the conclusion that this issue is not being dealt with properly either. Danielle Tullo from Cosmopolitan.com chatted with 15 college women about how social media and Instagram has affected how they feel about themselves. She spoke to a woman named Gabby and she told Tullo that “seeing a girl constantly post photos of her body and how she works out makes me feel bad about my self-image and changes my perception of myself.” She also spoke with a woman named Catherine who shared “In the past, I have felt pressure to have the 'perfect picture' and sometimes have been afraid to post a selfie because I get worried that someone will compare it with someone else's photo” (P). Comparing with others photos seems to be a large issue when it comes to the issues of self-esteem. What happens when you finally decide on that “perfect picture” and it doesn’t get half as many likes as you wanted it to? How does that make someone feel? Typically, not so good, but there are people out there who claim it doesn’t affect them. Jodie Gummow did a study to see the effects of social media, and of the 298 users studied, 50 percent said that “social media made their lives and their self-esteem worse” (Gummow).

Jodie Gummow, at alternet.org, describes the 7 telltale signs that social media is killing your self-esteem. The first sign is that “social media disrupts your real-world thoughts and interactions”. Meaning that you feel worried, uncomfortable, and just out of place when you cannot access social media. The second sign is when your “social media affects your mood.” The third is when “Real-life interactions are difficult and being alone is uncomfortable.” Gummow explains that this means things such as issues with face-to-face communication and that they don’t know the idea of alone time or patience. The fourth is when “You find yourself envious about what others are promoting.” This is similar to what I spoke about towards the beginning of this paper when people become jealous of the things others are doing and develop FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out). The fifth telltale sign that social media is killing your self-esteem is when “You relish in others’ misfortune” and you find that you are happy when you see others aren’t. the sixth sign is when “You measure your success by others.” Gummow expresses that this simply means that we think someone is lucky based on the pictures they post showing that they have “a lot going on.” The seventh, and last, telltale sign is when “You’re addicted to the attention and drama” always needing to be involved in something scandalous (Gummow). These seven telltale signs are some things to look at if you feel that you or someone else you know my have an issue with social media affecting their lives. But, when someone’s self-esteem is affected, what can happen to them?

There are multiple different things that can happen when someone’s self-esteem is manipulated. One of the major things that can develop are eating disorders. According to Judie Gumow, a new study released found a link between eating disorders and social media. She then concluded that “20 minutes on social media was enough to contribute to a user’s weight and shape concerns” (Gummow). Olivia Fleming at Elle describes how “unhealthy behaviors like ineffective or yo-yo dieting—and on the extreme end, eating disorders and body dysmorphic disorder—can arise when seeking social media validation turns into an obsession” (Fleming). The National Association for Self-Esteem states that “90% of eating disorders are found in girls” (Statistics on Girls). This wasn’t a very surprising statistic to me because I have only really seen and heard of eating disorder stories that involved girls. I seems to be because women have a harsher pressure to have the perfect body than men do. What are some of the specific things that caused issues with self-esteem you may say? Emily Shire shares that the most popular epidemic was the thigh gap, where “women post “inspirational” photos showcasing the growing gaps between their shrinking thighs and encourage other women to make their legs skinnier in a similar fashion” (Shire). This was an extremely popular desired look for women and girls within the last year or two. Steven Hinshaw’s statistic was put in at theheartofleadership.org stating that today, 1 in 4 girls fall into a clinical diagnosis – depression, eating disorders, cutting, and other mental/emotional disorders.  On top of these, many more report being constantly anxious, sleep deprived, and under significant pressure” (Statistics on Girls). While these disorders can be related to multiple different things, the effects of low self-esteem include a lot of the ones just described. According to Fiona Macrae, a Science Editor for The Daily Mail, a study found that “teenagers who spend more than two hours a day on Facebook and other social networking sites are much more likely to have mental health problems” and of those health problems, they “range from symptoms of depression, to having seriously contemplated suicide” (Macrae). There are deeper issues than just “thinking a little negatively about yourself that day.” As stated by Hayley Raney at the Omaha Central Register, social media can lead to addiction which can cause anxiety, sleeping problems, and issues with functioning in the real world (Raney).

Although there seem to be so many issues with Instagram and self-esteem, there are also a lot of positive effects that it has. Hayley Raney shares that “the social networking world does have some positive aspects. For example, some teens and young adults have become internet famous from social media outlets such as Vine and YouTube” and with these media outlets, they “try to create a positive self-image and explain to our generation that perfection doesn’t matter. A lot of the famous teens always say to ‘be yourself’” (Raney). There are multiple teenagers, young adults, and adults out there trying to improve on the worlds self-esteem issues and the pressures of the “perfect body” and the “perfect life.” Instagram is also a great media source to connect with your friends and see what they’re up to when you are not with them. There are not only negative comments made on pictures, there are also extremely positive comments. The negative comments seem to only happen on those who have a lot of followers (typically celebrities), I know that when I see pictures of friends, family, and classmates I see positive and sweet comments about how pretty or good looking someone looks in the picture, how great of a time that was, or just something nice that goes along with the picture. It is not very often that I have seen someone make a negative remark on someone’s picture. But when I do, I have also seen someone else say something back and stand up for the one who posted the picture. This world is becoming more and more willing to stand up for what’s right and making people feel better about themselves.

SECOND HEADER: YOUR RESEARCH—METHODS AND FINDINGS.

When I did my research, I wanted to find out a lot about the thoughts that went through someone’s mind when their self-esteem took a beating and what specific things acted as a trigger towards that. For my research, I interviewed my friend Bailee. She has had issues with her self-esteem ever since I’ve known her and I knew she would be the perfect candidate for an interview on this topic. I also thought she was a good candidate because her story shows just how much a low self-esteem can affect someone’s life. First, I asked her the basic question of why she feels she has low self-esteem. Her reply was “Because nowadays, our society expects everyone to be a twig and look a certain way. And I don’t look like that.” That led me to ask how her self-esteem issues affect her life on a daily basis. She explains how she feels extremely uncomfortable walking in public because she feels like everyone is watching and judging her on what she looks like. This was something that surprised me because I did not know this about her and I have not really heard about in the past. It’s difficult for her to even walk in public without thinking that people are judging her. That is a constant feeling that she thinks about everywhere she goes. It also affects what she wears because some days are “skinny days” and some are “fat days.” I, like most women, can completely understand this because for some reason, some days you feel skinnier than others and that can most definitely affect what you wear. When it came to Instagram, I asked her what types of pictures she posts and why? Bailee posts a large variety of pictures ranging from a selfie (if it’s good enough, family or friends she was with that day, or her dog because she loves him so much. She doesn’t seem to have an issue with posting the pictures that she wants. I think she does care what other people think about her pictures, but not to the extent of taking them down if she doesn’t get enough likes. I concluded that because I later asked her if the amount of likes she receives on her photos affects the feelings she has towards herself. She says she doesn’t really compare the two and doesn’t feel that the number of likes you receive should determine your self-worth. I really wanted to know how she felt when she saw the pictures others have posted of their “perfect bodies” on Instagram or vice versa. When she sees pictures of someone with an amazing body, she wishes she looked like them but it also gives her motivation to look like her. And the other way around, when she sees someone with a “not so perfect body” she doesn’t look at them and think negatively. She thinks it’s a great think to have that confidence in themselves. This was an inspiring thing to unveil from Bailee because I felt the same way. People shouldn’t have to worry about what others are thinking, it’s not their body! Bailee also explained how much the pressure to have the “perfect body” on Instagram affects her. The pressure affects her a lot. She shared with me how it is the drive of her depression she has because she “wants to look like what society wants me to look like.” She feels the perfect body consists of “a small waist, a thigh gap, a big butt, medium sized boobs, and thin arms.” Everyone thinks of the perfect body differently, but it definitely narrows the body type down when there is only one body type highlighted in society. When her self-esteem gets to a low point, it stops her from doing certain things. She shares how it is “kind of the reason I don’t like going out because girls go out with crop tops and skimpy clothing and I don’t feel comfortable in that.” Bailee isn’t a HUGE partier as it is, but she loves going to parties if she’s with me or our other friends. She has a great time, but deep down she always has those thoughts of judgement from other people. Back in the Secondary Research section, I talked about FOMO, or fear of missing out, and Bailee seemed to have a little of that. She explained that she feels very jealous of those people who post amazing pictures doing fun things, but it’s not to the point where she hates them. She just feels they’re extremely lucky to be able to do all of those things.

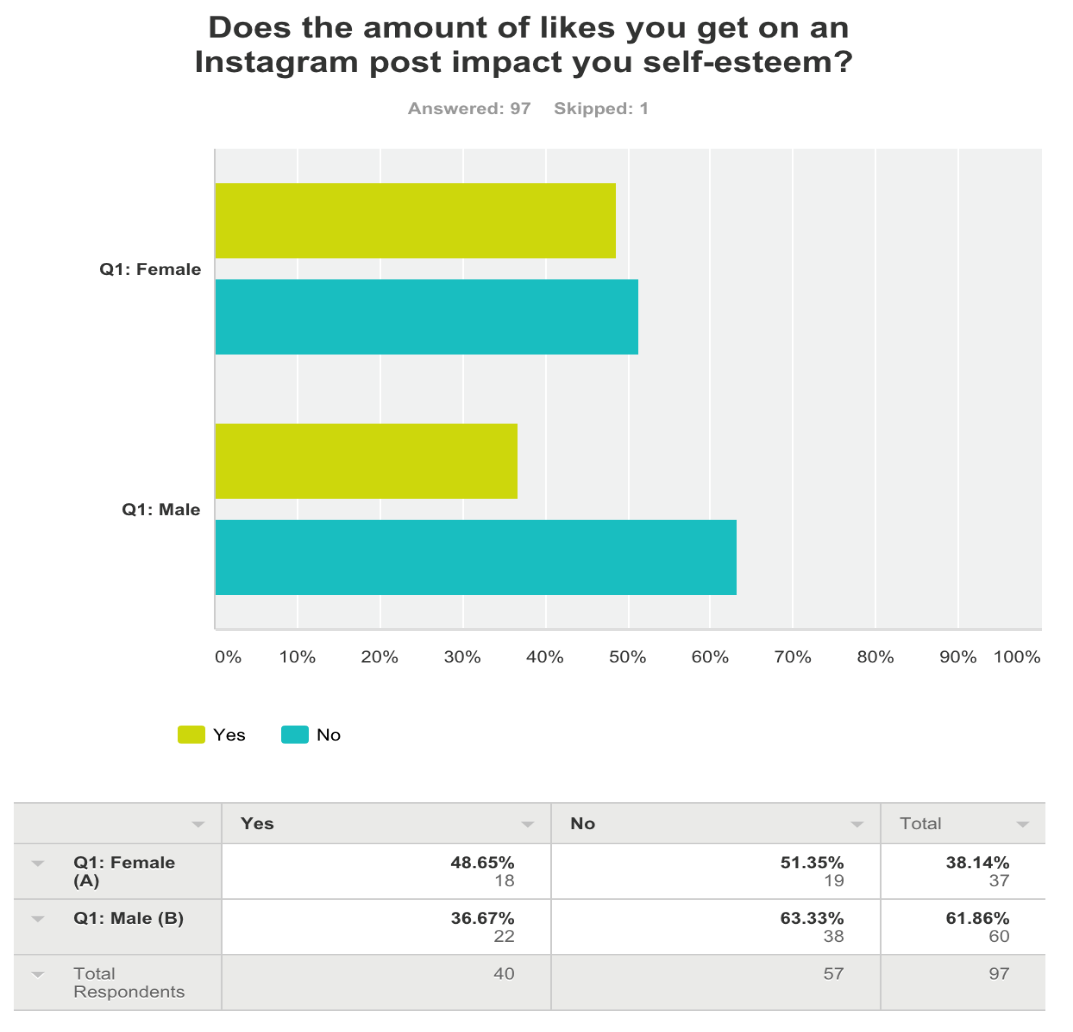


Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows the percentages of males and females whose self-esteem affected by the likes received on an Instagram post. They have separated the groups between male and female, and then separated it again by “yes” and “no.” The green bars represent the yesses from each, and the blue bars represent the no’s. Notice the difference in yes and no percentages between each sex. The males have a wider gap between the yes and no percentages than the females. While the females have a higher yes percentage than the males. This is important to understand because although there are differences in the percentages between the sexes, there is still a large number of people for each group that is impacted by the likes of their pictures. It has come to the point where the amount of times someone double clicks one’s picture to give it a like on Instagram will negatively impact one’s self-esteem. When I thought about this, I didn’t think that the males would have such a high yes percentage. Although their “no” percentages are higher, their yes percentage is only about 12% lower than the females. This shows that the males’ self-esteem is still affected by the number of likes on their photos. Which is something that a lot of people don’t think about.

THIRD HEADER: DISCUSSION OF EVERYTHING—ARGUMENT

Instagram is one of the leading social media sites that is taking over. It seems as if everyone I know has an Instagram these days, you can’t escape it. Likes and followers seems to be a huge issue when it comes to determining someone’s worth on the site. There are multiple people who have said that the number of likes they receive impacts them immensely, and others who say it does not impact them at all. People are using the number of likes and followers as a way of verification and acceptance in their peer group. So if someone didn’t receive a large number of likes on their picture, they would feel that they weren’t accepted in the group. On some occasions, the students were so upset with the number of likes they received on a picture that they actually took the picture down. It is astonishing to see what is really important in the lives of people nowadays. I know I’m the type of person to just like almost every picture on my timeline on Instagram. I don’t really discriminate on what it’s about, I just look at the pictures and like them because it seems the picture was important for that user to post. But how does one know if a picture is “good enough” to post on Instagram? What is the determining factor? Is it whether or not it will receive a lot of likes in the future? Likes and followers are thought about too much. One thing that completely caught me off guard, but isn’t too surprising is that companies have started to look at the number of followers you have on Instagram to measure your “monetary value” and to determine if you’re fit for the career. Since when is it normal to base someone’s ability to work off of their social media account. I’m not too surprised considering the work field and the social media field have been slowly combining, but I don’t feel it is a proper way to hire someone.

The Fear of Missing Out is a large component of self-esteem when it comes to Instagram as well. People are constantly comparing their lives to others through the pictures they post on Instagram. Someone will post a picture of the party they went to that night or the amazing vacation that they’re on and the other person will feel horrible inside because they feel like they should be doing those things too at that age. Or they have feeling of jealousy take over. Everyone always wants others to think they’re lives are amazing, so why not post the best possible picture you can? A lot of the time, pictures are posted to look like they’re having a blast when in reality it isn’t even that fun. Celebrities seems to be the highlight causation of the self-esteem issues. Celebrities make it out to others that they have the perfect lives, bodies, and relationships. When their pictures are posted, let’s say it was a selfie, most of the time they’re edited beyond belief. With all of the editing sites out there nowadays it is possible to do almost anything. Kendall Jenner has recently been in the spotlight, and seeing how she is the age of a lot of my friends and peers, she makes you feel like she’s better than you. It’s nothing she does intentionally, it’s just the fact that were all the same age and she’s doing things in her life making her so extremely successful and girls at home aren’t doing half that. Celebrities can give a false sense of what life is all about and if people feel inferior to them because they don’t look like the celebrities or they aren’t doing the things they are, there’s an obvious issue at hand. They’re celebrities, they have the money to do all of those things.

Self-esteem can be affected in more ways than one when it comes to Instagram. The media has a specific body type that they rave over, giving others who don’t necessarily have that body type, a feeling of worthlessness. I’ve been there, done that. You look at these models and these people in the spotlight and you wonder how in the world they look like they do and do the things they do. Of the pictures posted on Instagram, some are afraid to post a selfie because they’re worried that others with compare their photo to the “perfect” ones. But the things that go along with self-esteem are the worst part. It can lead to eating disorders, body dysmorphia, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, sleep issues, and so much more. It can, in the literal sense, kill you. My roommate Bailee, who I interviewed above, has developed depression because of it. It is a terrible thing and is so hard to watch someone you’re so close to deal with. She hates everything about her body and no matter what you say, her mind is made up. We are our own worse critic, we look at ourselves in every little detail and pick out the worst things about ourselves to focus on.

With all the negative aspects that Instagram brings along to self-esteem, there are most definitely positive effects as well. There are people who become famous on Instagram and other social media sites, giving them the support they need. The best part is that of the people who become famous, there are so many who are pushing to help others feel good about themselves and to help with the issues they are facing. Instagram is a wonderful way to see your friends’ memories captured in a picture, creating happiness. The positive comments given on photos can increase self-esteem and happiness for the users. It is always a great feeling knowing someone liked your picture enough to comment on it.

Overall, Instagram has more than one effect on self-esteem. It gives both positive and negative effects on a person. With the amount of likes a user receives along with the fear of missing out, it can create low self-esteem. With low self-esteem, it can create other health hazards such as eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, and other health issues that threaten lives. The positive aspects are wonderful, creating a gateway for socialization through pictures. I was extremely glad to interview my roommate Bailee about her experiences with low self-esteem through Instagram. It paved a way of information through a different perspective that I hadn’t heard of before. Instagram is a large part of the lives of young adults, and if the life of the social media site wants to continue, certain measures should be taken in order to help the situation of low self-esteem.

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